

Dirt with a side of ketchup...

We dig in it all the time, but have you ever thought about what gives dirt its smell – or flavor?

I’ve written before about different kinds of the wonderful earthy stuff we grow plants in, and how some folks who insist it be called soil hold their noses when I call it dirt.

But good soils actually smell. Not talking about the low-oxygen stink of wet blue mud, but the slightly sweet fragrance you get when you turn compost or smell a rain coming. It’s similar to catfish, mushrooms, and freshly-dug potatoes. It’s also what gives drinking water taken from lakes and rivers a kinda skunky but harmless aroma and flavor during hot summers.

It’s mostly from an oil called geosmin that’s exuded by bacteria during dry periods. When raindrops hit dry soil, or as a low pressure front ahead of a storm moves in and “degasses” the soil, small bubbles of geosmin float to the surface and release aerosols, which are called petrichor – which is what we smell.

Geosmin breaks down in acid conditions, which is why we use vinegar or lemon juice in many fish recipes. Along those lines, a lot of old-timer gardeners could

tell if their soil needed lime or not by touching it to the tip of their tongue to see if it was “sweet” or alkaline, or “sour” and acidic enough to need a little lime added.

It’s not as accurate as having a soil sample tested by the MSU Extension Service folks, but about as easy to figure out as the computerized agriculture-related recommendations that confuse average home gardeners.

If you have your soil tested and need help converting to garden-friendly fertilizers, call the extension office.

Many people actually eat baked dirt. There’s an eating condition called “pica” in which people irresistibly crave strange stuff like clay, talcum powder, and even charcoal, cigarette ash, spray starch, and cardboard toilet paper rolls. Dirt eating, also known as geophagia, is so common that researchers at the University Medical Center have studied it; a friend of mine from the New York Times came here to interview some Mississippi clay eaters.

There are well-researched benefits, including providing important mineral supplements lacking in diets, buffering against acids and tannins in acorns and certain other native foods, boosting immune systems, and reduc-



Cooked dirt, ready to eat.

ing diarrhea.

That last one is obvious; Kaopectate, an over-the-counter diarrhea medicine, is a slurry of chalky kaolin clay from Georgia. But before you go gnoshing on dirt, check with a doctor. Eating too much can cause digestive disorders and keep the body from absorbing iron, which can lead to anemia.

Dirt eaters prefer specific kinds of chalky-textured clay, found only in certain areas. And because they are usually bland and taste kinda earthy from the geosmin,

after baking and breaking it into small chunks, most clay eaters splash on a little vinegar to add a bit of acidic tang which reduces the dirt flavor. I guess a true Southerner would try a little vinegar-based ketchup.

Last little esoteric item on dirt: In 2003 our legislators designated Natchez Silt

loam, that band of tightly-packed wind-blown dust that gradually formed the loess bluffs and hills on the edge of Mississippi River, as Mississippi’s official state soil. Really.

But before you make the easy leap from garden soils to how politicians are always trying to find dirt on one another, just don’t. There’s enough of both kinds to go around.

Besides, some of the latter kind of dirt can be hard to swallow, leave a bad taste, or be just too difficult to digest. Stick with clay.

Felder Rushing is an 11th-generation American gardener who has traveled to all fifty states (lectured in 36) and across five continents looking for interesting gardening angles to share via his extensive lecturing, writing and broadcasting. The graduate horticulturist and free-thinking university professor has written syndicated newspaper columns for 38 years and hosted a live radio program for nearly that long, including 15 years now as the weekly host of The Gestalt Gardener, one of National Public Radio’s most popular gardening programs. Email gardening questions to rushingfelder@yahoo.com

County gets money back on tax exempt lands

Press Release

U.S. Senator Cindy Hyde-Smith (R-Miss.) announced Thursday, June 20, that Mississippi will receive \$2.16 million in Payment in Lieu of Taxes (PILT) payments for 2019.

The FY2019 PILT payments going to 72 Mississippi counties range in value from \$245,653 for Lafayette County to \$111 for Noxubee County.

The payments are issued by the U.S. Department of the Interior to counties with tax-exempt, federally-owned lands, water projects and some military installations.

“PILT appropriations are intended to help defray some of the tax revenue lost by counties that host national forests, wildlife refuges, and some military installations,” Hyde-Smith said.

Holmes County is set to receive \$2,829 for 1,022 acres of land.

“Mississippi isn’t like some western states where the federal government owns most of the land, but our state does support a variety of federal interests, which makes counties eligible for some assistance,” she said.

Hyde-Smith serves on the Senate Interior and Environment Appropriations Subcommittee that has jurisdiction over the PILT program.

The PILT program is administered by the Office of

the Secretary of the Interior. The payments, which vary from year to year, are issued using a formula based on population, revenue-sharing payments, and the amount of federal land in a county.

Author of school consolidation lessens penalty for weed possession

Staff Report

A Mississippi city council says they won’t arrest first-time offenders in possession of an ounce or less of marijuana.

News outlets report Hattiesburg City Council unanimously passed the regulation Tuesday, June 18, saying first-time offenders will receive a citation instead of jail time.

Marijuana remains illegal in Mississippi, but Mayor Toby Barker says this ordinance helps modernize the city’s approach to drug policy. He says issuing tickets removes the stigma of being taken to jail and saves the city the cost of incarceration. Instead, first-time offenders will be summoned to court, and if found guilty will pay a fine up to \$100.

Barker, a former state representative, is the original author of the Mississippi House Bill that proposed consolidation of the Durant



June 27 - Pam Langford, Elysabeth Floyd, Aden Lewis, Adam Lewis, Stacie Sizemore, Glenda D. Branscome, James Brown

June 28 - Brittany LaShay Baker, Marilyn Walker, Calvin McAdams, Hunter Hutchison, Sheila Hammett, Bluford Taylor, Charles E. Simmon

June 29 - Raymond Jackson, Haley O. Woodward, Donna Diggs, Mary Elizabeth Diggs, Carolyn C. Smart, Steve Sizemore, Linda Dickerson, Jim Haffey, Misty Goering, LaQuita Hughes

June 30 - Justin Develin, Cedric Brown, Lindell Epps, Jhayden Moore, Ashley Davidson, Addie Burrell, Gia Turner, Cade McBride

July 1 - Drew Parrish, Lyndsey Tutor, Dominique Bullocks, Leah Gilbert, Gibbs White, Colton Howell, Hollie Belle Boykin, Cleveland Whiteside, Jr., Miranda Killebrew

July 2 - Randy Langford, Angela Hammons, Allison Langford, Edna Newton, Ashley Box, Shane Sanford, Brian Wooten, Drennan Word, Dwayne Payton

July 3 - Alston Gilbert, Shannon Lewis, Maggie Carter, Brent Richardson, Kelsey Watts, Faye Engle



June 27 - Robert and Dawn Ashley

June 28 - Wayne and Pat Ellis, Mr. and Mrs. Danny Robertson, Frankie and Robin McCrory

June 29 - Sherman and Debbie Partain

June 30 - Charles Christopher and Teresa Bates, Chuck and Nikki Edwards, Michael and Dea Bowling, Frankie and Lane Vargas, Blake and Brittany Powell, Jarrett and Karey Johnson

July 1 - Chris and Christina Farmer

July 3 - Todd and Mitzi Wilson, William and Brenda Powell

To add your birthdays and anniversaries to our list, please send your information by mail to P.O. Box 60, Lexington, MS 39095; fax 662-834-1074; email to hcherald@gmail.com; or stop by our office at 308 Court Square in Lexington. No phone calls, please.

School District with Holmes County in 2017.

Hattiesburg Police Chief Anthony Parker says the ordinance is an affirmation of current police practice.

Political advertising available in the *Herald* for 2019 elections

All political advertising/announcements are on a first come, first serve basis.

All advertising must be paid in full before being published in the Holmes County Herald.

- **\$200 - Page One political announcement (one run only):**
 - **400 words with picture**
 - **500 words no picture**
- **\$300 - Page One top banner - must run minimum four times**
- **\$5/week for name only listing in political strip**
- **All other advertising at local rates. Call 662-834-1151 for more information.**

DEADLINE TO SUBMIT ALL CONTENT FOR ADS IS FRIDAY BY 5 P.M. FOR THE FOLLOWING WEEK’S PAPER.